

# News Release

# Senator Pete V. Domenici

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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## DOMENICI: BIGGER CASELOADS TAX N.M. FEDERAL COURTS

### Senator Advocates More Resources for Border Courts, Prosecutors

ALBUQUERQUE -- With the federal government increasing funding and personnel for apprehending drug traffickers and criminals in Southwest border states, U.S. Senator Pete Domenici today advocated more resources for courts, prosecutors and prisons to handle the cases resulting from increasing border anti-crime activities in New Mexico and other states.

Domenici today addressed a District Court Conference with participants from Southwest border districts. The conference was convened to address the dramatic increase in caseloads over the past five years, primarily due to growing numbers of illegal immigration and drug cases at the border. By 2002, the five federal border judicial districts (Southern District of California, Arizona, New Mexico, South and West Texas) will handle almost a third of all federal criminal cases in the entire United States.

In New Mexico, the Las Cruces federal court now handles 65 percent of the federal criminal cases in the state, but it has no sitting federal judge. Magistrates and a senior judge handle the entire caseload.

"While most Americans approve of the drug busts at the border and the large-scale arrest of people seeking to enter this country illegally, I'm sure very few clearly understand the ripple effect these policies have on our court system," Domenici said.

"It is highly unlikely that Congress will change our criminal laws to reverse the trend of more arrests and prosecutions, particularly in the area of illegal drugs. But it is unfair and short-sighted for Congress to demand more law enforcement at the border without a corresponding increase in judicial and prison resources," he said.

Domenici expressed support for the Administrative Office of the Courts recommendation to create 16 new judge positions in the federal border courts, but said action on this proposal probably will not occur until a new administration takes office next year.

"Until then, there are other things Congress can do, like provide more court personnel,

magistrates, marshals, pre-trial and probation officers to try and lighten the load,” Domenici said. “I hope this conference will produce recommendations and ideas on better ways to manage the growing caseload problem in the near term, and that they are shared with policymakers in Washington.”

Domenici noted that the Clinton administration requested \$3.5 billion for district courts and judicial services in FY 2001. Last year, Congress appropriated \$3.1 billion for the courts, nearly \$200 million more than the president’s FY 2000 request.

Domenici, Senate Budget Committee chairman, also serves on the Commerce, Justice, State and the Judiciary Subcommittee that provides funding for U.S. Justice Department activities, including the U.S. District Courts.

The Senator indicated that he will focus this year on securing funding for a new federal courthouse in Las Cruces, where security is a growing concern. Funding to develop this project was not included in Clinton’s FY 2001 budget plan.